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ABSTRACT

E-mail reference services in Ohio public libraries was studied using the survey method in January 1999. Through the Ohio Public Library Information Network (OPLIN), the researcher identified 94 Ohio public libraries that have World Wide Web pages that host an e-mail address as a contact method. Fifty-nine questionnaires were returned, resulting in a response rate of 63%. Of these respondents, 88.1% were libraries with collections under 550,000 volumes. While an increase in e-mail was noted by most participants, 52.5% of the respondents estimated that reference questions from patrons via e-mail are less than 25% of the library's total e-mail. Publicity of e-mail reference is not significant, with 71.2% of the respondents stating that their respective libraries have not advertised this option for reference service. A copy of the questionnaire is appended. (Contains 14 references.) (Author/MES)

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E-mail Reference in Ohio Public Libraries

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A Master's Research Paper submitted to the
Kent State University School of Library
and Information Science
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Library Science

by

Teresa M. Lay

May, 1999

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The use of electronic mail (e-mail) for communication has developed with the influx of computer technology in businesses, schools and homes. More people are connected to the Internet and the World Wide Web each year. Academic, special and public libraries are beginning to post Web sites to allow patrons greater freedom in accessing information. Of these sites, many offer at least one e-mail address as a contact method. While there have been studies of e-mail reference, the number is relatively small and predominantly involves academic libraries.

Rationale/Need for the Study

Ohio's public libraries are in a unique position with the advent of Ohio Public Library Information Network (OPLIN), a comprehensive network of which one function is listing Ohio's 250 public libraries with each library's address, phone number, fax number and, if available, Web page address [or Uniform Resource Locator (URL)]. Although not all of Ohio's public libraries have posted Web sites, at least fifty of the libraries with such sites include an e-mail address as a contact option within the Web page, inviting the possibility of reference questions via e-mail.

In Cincinnati, while specifically requested by users of Tri-State Online (a Cincinnati area community access computer system), librarians refused to offer e-mail reference service, reasoning, "The reference interview is necessary in order to determine the user's needs. Online communication cannot replace this interaction" (Abate and Young 1992, 115). However, e-mail reference interviews were used and studied at the College of

Library and Information Services at the University of Maryland (Abels 1996) with the suggestion that such service would soon become commonplace. Diaz (1994, 5) writes that e-mail reference "allows librarians to check for questions at a time when they can give full attention to the problem, and allows time to find an answer without having a patron wait on the phone or follow the librarian around the reference room." The impact of e-mail reference on and its use in public libraries is in early stages of study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to survey the use and policies of e-mail reference in Ohio public libraries, specifically the libraries whose Web sites list an e-mail address.

Definition of Terms

E-mail reference as referred to in this study is electronic mail that is sent to the library from patrons, with a special emphasis on reference questions.

The Ohio Public Library Information Network (OPLIN) provides free access for Ohio's library patrons and librarians to global electronic information and online information services. Within the OPLIN Web site (http://www.oplin.lib.oh.us), a page is devoted to Ohio public libraries. Visitors to the Web site can select a county on the map and from there will be given a page with a listing of that county's public libraries. The libraries with Web sites are linked from this listing page.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to Ohio public libraries. The findings are not necessarily generalizable to all public libraries in the United States. The study is also limited to Ohio public libraries that have Web sites available via OPLIN at http://www.oplin.lib.oh.us, and which said Web sites display an e-mail address as a contact method. The findings will not

take into account the libraries in which the Web sites do not list an e-mail contact mode or in which the only e-mail address is directed to a Webmaster whose duty it is to maintain the design and links of the page, not the correspondence.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The option of electronic mail (e-mail) reference services has been researched within the academic library environment more than within the public library setting. Consequently, issues raised by academic librarians and patrons play a significant role in understanding and presenting similar services in public libraries. Topics presented in the literature are: pros and cons of e-mail reference; e-mail reference interview techniques; types of e-mail reference users; frequency of e-mail reference use; and management of e-mail reference services.

The literature dealing with pros and cons of e-mail reference begins with Roysdon and Elliott (1988) who observe that e-mail reference, while not allowing for non-verbal cues, does encourage a more thoughtful approach than telephone reference. Diaz (1994) and Maciuszko (1990) discuss the extension of the reference desk through e-mail access. Drawbacks include slow response rates and a lack of personal interaction (Maciuszko 1990, 32). Despite the limitations (Abate and Young 1992, 115), difficulties (Lee 1996) and the frequent challenges (Fishman 1998, 3), e-mail reference is an option libraries are considering and implementing. Advantages of e-mail reference based on the experience of the University of Maryland at Baltimore Health Sciences Library were 24-hour user access, reduced spoken language barriers, individual options for question/answer databases and ease to refer questions (Fishman 1998, 2).

Some libraries create policies to limit e-mail and telephone reference requests to basic factual questions in an attempt to limit communication problems found with e-mail reference interviews (Frank 1998). However, there are libraries that offer in-depth reference service via e-mail, due mostly to the increase in remote access capabilities (Abels 1996; Tibbo 1995). Focusing on archival collections, Tibbo (1995) discusses the need in an e-mail reference transaction to set the tone, clarify the question, deliver the information and assess the success of service. Coming from an academic setting, Abels (1996) presents her study of approaches used in e-mail reference interviews and recommends a systematic approach involving a search request form. Offering the service in a public library "exemplifies how a public library visualizes its role in its community and actually takes steps to realize its mission in the electronic age" (Lee 1996, 60).

A study of users found that frequent users of e-mail reference are individuals who find the library system too complex, individuals who do not like to use the telephone, individuals who are completing research at their computers, and individuals whose native language is not English (Johnston and Grusin 1995). Bushallow-Wilber et al. (1996) discovered that many e-mail reference users transmitted requests during regular business hours and that there were few regular users of the service. E-mail reference can expand the confines of a library's notion of user while reaching out to more people (Frank 1998, 8). Specialized topics such as education (Summers 1998), medicine/health (Fishman 1998) and archival information (Tibbo 1995) are being offered through e-mail reference.

Frequency of e-mail reference use in the early 1990s was low, and an informal study showed that staff time was minimal (Still and Campbell 1993). The University of South Florida initially limited the advertising of its service via e-mail "to avoid being

overwhelmed" (Frank 1996, 8). Bushallow-Wilber et al. note that "the number of queries is manageably low enough that a library can offer the service without extraordinary peril to staffing resources" (1998, 359-60). Increased promotion of e-mail reference has been suggested in the literature (Fishman 1998).

The management of e-mail reference service is not apparent in the literature. Procedures for training e-mail reference staff to ensure quality and the library's "online image" as well as a print manual is recommended (Lee 1996, 60). Fishman (1998) also lists ideas for management and promotion.

Studies have revealed there are many challenges for libraries that offer e-mail reference service. Remote capabilities are here; the use of such capabilities is in its infancy. "The future of electronic mail in libraries may rest in the way it is perceived by librarians. Electronic mail should not be viewed as an added option but should be treated as a routine option for library communications" (Whitaker 1989, 365).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The survey method was used in this study. The questionnaire was addressed to the library director, or a specific reference librarian if that was the contact name which appeared on the Web site. (See Appendix B.) These individuals were selected from the data available via OPLIN (http://www.oplin.lib.oh.us) and its "Ohio Public Library" page which has links to the individual Web sites. The next step was determining whether or not an e-mail address was given as a contact method within the individual Web page. This did not include the Webmaster's e-mail address which pertains only to design and faulty links. Instead, this study was concerned with e-mail addresses designed as a method to contact the library personnel regarding the library and library services.

The questionnaires and self-addressed, stamped envelopes were sent through the United States Postal Service. This method provided more assurance that a named person would receive the questionnaire since e-mail may not be checked as frequently. Also, the researcher's Internet expertise did not allow for the timely design of an e-mail questionnaire that would not require the participant to download the form and send it back using the postal service without the necessary stamped, return envelope. After approximately one week, follow-up e-mails were sent to ask if the questionnaire was received, to encourage the return of the questionnaire, and to thank them for their consideration of the study.

Once data was collected, it was analyzed using tables to determine frequency correlation of variables such as library collection size, e-mail reference use by patrons, frequency of checking e-mail by library personnel, and specific policy guidelines.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

During the last week of December, 1998, the researcher systematically browsed the Ohio Public Library Information Network (OPLIN) to determine which Ohio public libraries had Web sites and of those libraries which ones had an e-mail address displayed as a method to contact the library. This selection of libraries included libraries in which different staff members had their own professional accounts. Libraries which had no e-mail addresses listed, which only had an e-mail address for the Webmaster, or which specifically stated no reference questions accepted through e-mail, were not included in this research. A total of 94 Ohio public libraries were identified. A questionnaire was sent to each of these libraries, either to the attention of the named library director or to the named head of reference. Fifty-nine questionnaires were returned, making a 63 percent response rate.

Of these 59 libraries, the collection size is generally on the smaller end, with 52.5 percent reporting less than 100,000 volumes; 35.6 percent reporting collections between 100,000 and 549,999 volumes; 5.1 percent reporting collections between 550,000 and 1,000,000 volumes; and 3.4 percent reporting collections over 1,000,000 volumes. Two of the returned questionnaires had no answer marked for collection size. (See Table 1.) The relationship between collection size and the library's location has a parallel in that the majority of the respondents (57.6 percent) defined their libraries as rural. Suburban libraries accounted for 35.6 percent of the respondents, while 6.8 percent of the responding libraries were described as urban. (See Table 2.)

Table 1. Distribution of Collection Size of Ohio Public Libraries which Post an E-mail Address on its Library Web Page

Collection Size	f	%
Under 100,000 volumes	31	52.5
100,000 to 549,999 volumes	21	35.6
550,000 to 1,000,000 volumes	3	5.1
Over 1,000,000 volumes	2	3.4
[left blank]	2	3.4
Total	59	100.0

Table 2. Distribution of Library Location Descriptor of Ohio Public Libraries which Post an E-mail Address on its Library Web Page

Library Location Descriptor	f	%
Rural	34	57.6
Suburban	21	35.6
Urban	4	6.8
Total	59	100.0

Most of these libraries (86.4 percent) have had an operational Web page between one and three years. Eight and a half percent reported having an operational Web site less than one year; 5.1 percent of the respondents have had an operational Web site between four and six years. (See Table 3.)

The influx of e-mail after the implementation of the Web page increased for most of the responding libraries. Forty-two (72.4 percent) of the respondents noted an increase. Nine of these remarked that the increase is very minor. However, three noted a

Table 3. Distribution of Years of an Operational Web Page of Ohio Public Libraries which Post an E-mail Address on its Library Web Page

Years Operational	f	%
Less than one	5	8.5
One to three years	51	86.4
Four to six years	3	5.1
Total	59	100.0

substantial increase in questions from other states and countries including Hong Kong, Peru and Poland. (See Table 4.) In particular, one respondent wrote, "We get questions from all over the country now, some of which would be better directed to more local libraries. (I guess they don't have Web e-mail available.)" Of the respondents who have detected no increase in e-mail (27.6 percent), three included comments. One remarked that they have yet to receive an e-mail. The second stated that patrons do not seem to use it for reference or correspondence. The third noted that they have received no e-mail from patrons, stating that most patrons who see the Web page are in the library at the time.

Table 4. Distribution of the Increase of E-mail Received by Surveyed Ohio Public Libraries since the Implementation of a Web Page

Increase in E-mail Received	f	%
Yes	42	72.4
No	17	27.6
Total	59	100.0

Overall, the number of e-mail messages received from patrons in a week by the respondents is on the low end with 45 of the respondents (76.3 percent) estimating that between one and ten e-mails a week are from patrons. Two respondents noted that it was less than that, although that was not an option on the questionnaire. Five respondents elected not to answer the question. (See Table 5.)

Table 5. Distribution of the Estimated Number of Weekly E-mails Received from Patrons by Ohio Public Libraries which Post an E-mail Address on its Web Page.

Number of Weekly E-mails from Patrons	f	%
Less than one e-mail	2	3.3
1 to 10 e-mails	45	76.3
11 to 20 e-mails	5	8.5
21-30 e-mails	2	3.4
[left blank]	5	8.5
Total	59	100.0

A written policy regarding e-mail use is not common in these libraries with 88.1 percent of 59 respondents reporting there is no policy. (See Table 6.) One respondent did note that while there was no written policy, e-mail questions are answered according to the general reference service guidelines of the library.

Table 6. Distribution of the Surveyed Ohio Public Libraries that have a Written Policy Regarding the Library's Response to E-mail.

Written E-mail Policy	f	%
Yes	3	5.1
No	52	88.1
[left blank]	4	6.8
Total	59	100.0

Still, with or without a policy, library e-mail is frequently checked. Over 62 percent responded that their library e-mail is checked once a day; 8.5 percent check at least once a week. The "other" option was selected by 17 of the respondents (28.8 percent). Fourteen of these reported that e-mail was checked frequently throughout the day; two noted that e-mail was checked a few times a week; one responded that their library e-mail is not checked at all, explaining that the address on the Web page is not currently an active link. (See Table 7.)

Table 7. Distribution of the Frequency of Opening the Library's E-mail Account to Check for New E-mail by Surveyed Ohio Public Libraries.

How Often E-mail is Opened	f	%
Once a day	37	62.7
Once a week	5	8.5
Other	17	28.8
Total	59	100.0

When questioned about the person responsible for checking the e-mail account, 37.3 percent of the respondents (a total of 22) noted it was the library director. Five respondents (8.5 percent) marked that a paraprofessional was assigned the task; eleven respondents (18.6 percent) stated that a reference librarian checked the e-mail. Five answers were combinations of reference librarians and paraprofessionals, or the director and the assistant director. Other answers were the Webmaster, the clerk/treasurer, the computer services librarian, the head of technology services, the systems administrator, and the administration secretary. Two respondents noted that the library did not have one

e-mail address, that each person had his/her own e-mail account listed on the Web page and the responsibility for that account. (See Table 8.)

Table 8. Distribution of Personnel Responsible for Checking the Library E-mail Account.

Position of Personnel	f	%
Library Director	22	37.3
Reference Librarian	11	18.6
Paraprofessional	5	8.5
Other	21	36.6
Total	59	100.0

Once the e-mail has been checked, the method of forwarding or distributing the messages was fairly evenly matched among three methods. A copy is printed and given to the appropriate person by 13 of the respondents (22 percent). Forwarding by e-mail is the method used by 14 of the respondents (23.7 percent). Ten respondents (16.9 percent) stated that a hard copy is either delivered or the information is forwarded by e-mail. Eleven (18.6 percent) responded that distribution generally is unnecessary, noting that the person who checks the account is also the same person who answers the questions. (See Table 9.)

The predominant types of questions that patrons send via e-mail to the library as described by the respondents are, in order: reference questions, genealogy/local history questions, general informational questions about the library, and requests for materials (reserves/ purchases/renewals).

Table 9. Distribution of the Method to Distribute the E-mail Received.

Distribution Method	f	%
Deliver hard copy	13	22.0
Forward by e-mail	14	23.7
Make hard copy and/or forward by e-mail	10	16.9
Not necessary	11	18.6
Other	11	18.6
Total	59	100.0

Respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of the monthly e-mail that was reference-related. Over half (52.4 percent) listed that less than 25 percent of the monthly e-mail consists of reference questions. Seven respondents (11.9 percent) marked that between 25 and 50 percent of the monthly e-mail is reference; the same number chose not to answer this question. Six respondents (10.2 percent) noted that between 50 and 75 percent of the monthly e-mail was reference, and the rest (eight respondents) selected the category of 75 percent or more. (See Table 10.) Most respondents (93.2 percent) acknowledge that they accept e-mail reference. (See Table 11.) Fourteen respondents (23.7 percent) have a Web page in which there is a fill-in form provided for reference questions to be sent back to the library.

When e-mail reference is received, over half of the respondents (54.2 percent) do not have an assigned person to answer the question. However, 61.1 percent of the respondents noted that a librarian was the one who answered the question. One respondent commented that the most suitable person received the forwarded e-mail based upon the type of question. Another respondent wrote that in his particular library system, the e-mail reference option is part of the children's services only and is utilized often by

Table 10. Distribution of Percentage of Monthly E-mail that is Reference.

Percentage of Monthly E-mail that is Reference	f	%
Less than 25 percent	31	52.4
Between 25 and 50 percent	7	11.9
Between 50 and 75 percent	6	10.2
More than 75 percent	8	18.6
[left blank]	7	11.9
Total	59	100.0

Table 11. Distribution of Ohio Public Libraries which Post an E-mail Address on a Web Page and Accept E-mail Reference.

Acceptance of E-mail Reference	f	%
Yes	55	93.2
No	1	1.7
[left blank]	3	5.1
Total	59	100.0

teachers. Still another respondent remarked that the genealogy librarian received the e-mail questions since most of the questions were related to genealogy.

Response time in answering e-mail reference questions is relatively quick. Twenty-six respondents (44.1 percent) marked that a response was sent within a day. Nineteen respondents (32.2 percent) designated that a response was issued in two days. (See Table 12.) One respondent expressed that an acknowledgement was sent within 24 hours.

Table 12. Distribution of Response Time to a Patron E-mail Reference Question by Ohio Public Libraries which Post an E-mail Address on a Web Page.

Response Time	f	%
One day	26	44.1
Two days	19	32.2
A week	5	8.5
Other	5	8.5
[left blank]	4	6.7
Total	59	100.0

Another respondent, who did not select an answer, instead wrote, "We've set no limits. We answer the questions usually the same day or next day." Of the comments, the nature of the question was important in how quickly a response was sent. One respondent wrote that the policy was to e-mail the patron back and ask the patron to telephone the library with the question instead.

Is a reference interview negotiated successfully via e-mail? The largest portion of respondents (69.1 percent) felt that it could be done. However, 25.4 percent disagreed, including three respondents who strongly disagreed. Only two respondents strongly felt that reference interviews were successful via e-mail. (See Table 13.)

Table 13. Distribution of Surveyed Ohio Public Libraries as to Attitude toward the Possibility of Successful Reference Interviews via E-mail.

Reference Interviews Possible via E-mail	f	%
Strongly agree	2	3.4
Agree	37	62.7
Disagree	12	20.3
Strongly disagree	3	5.1
[left blank]	5	8.5
Total	59	100.0

On a scale from one to five (one being the lowest), the success of e-mail reference ranged in the middle: 3.4 percent selected one: 13.6 percent selected two: 32.2 percent selected three; 20.3 percent selected four; 13.6 percent selected five; and 16.9 percent elected not to answer this question. (See Table 14.) Comments as to success included: "depends on the complexity of the question," "too slow for a successful reference interview," "difficult to know exactly what the patron is asking," "have had positive response from users, but volume remains low." The lack of volume is noted by seven respondents as to the reason e-mail reference is not successful. Two respondents expressed the frequent lack of a follow-up response from the patron. "Often after we give an answer, we never hear from the person again, making it difficult to determine the answer's success," wrote one of the respondents.

Table 14. Distribution of Attitudes toward the Success of E-mail Reference by Responding Ohio Public Librarians.

Success Rate (On a Scale from 1 to 5, with 1 Being Low).	f	%
1 (low)	2	3.4
2	8	13.6
3	19	32.2
4	12	20.3
5 (high)	8	13.6
[left blank]	10	16.9
Total	59	100.0

In comparing e-mail reference to other modes of reference questioning, respondents were asked to select whether e-mail reference was similar to reference via telephone, in

person, via postal service, and via fax. In comparison with the telephone, 30.5 percent felt it was comparable. Compared with being in person, 6.8 percent felt there was a similarity to e-mail reference. According to 61 percent, reference via postal service is the same as reference via e-mail. Even more of the respondents (67.8 percent) felt that e-mail reference was similar to reference via fax. (See Table 15.)

Table 15. Distribution of Similarity of E-mail Reference to Other Modes of Reference Questions

Mode of Reference	f	%
Via telephone	18	30.5
In person	4	6.8
Via postal service	36	61.0
Via fax	40	67.8

When it comes to publicizing e-mail reference, 42 respondents (71.2 percent) noted that there was no publicity about the service. Of those who do publicize, the most frequently mentioned methods were the library newsletter or on the Web page itself. Two respondents wrote that press releases were sent to local newspapers. One respondent wrote, "I better check my Web page to make sure that it is really pointing to my e-mail address, since I've never gotten e-mail from a patron. E-mail reference seems like a perfectly reasonable way of doing reference. We may have to put in our Web page an invitation to ask reference questions."

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

E-mail reference is not yet a largely utilized service by patrons of Ohio public libraries. A factor in this is the lack of publicity. Quite possibly, patrons, or would-be patrons, simply are unaware the option exists. On many of the library Web pages available through OPLIN, there are few that explicitly state that reference questions are welcome via e-mail. As with many library services, publicity often reaches the people who are already aware of the service: on the Web page and through newsletters to library patrons.

Library personnel of Ohio public libraries who offer e-mail reference service are interested in the service. While there is a lack of written policy regarding e-mail reference service, library e-mail is frequently checked and the majority of respondents state that they accept reference questions via e-mail and attempt to answer each question in a timely manner. The majority of the respondents have librarians who not only answer the questions but also check the e-mail account. However, a commitment to the service as demonstrated by a fill-in form for patrons to send questions directly to the library is demonstrated by a relatively small number of respondents. Granted, a library director with a small staff must prioritize services. Based on the number of e-mail reference questions received in a week by the majority of the respondents, a fill-in form might take up more time and resources in the actual design than in the number of people who would be helped by the option.

Overall, e-mail reference in Ohio public libraries is in its beginning stages. The main point this researcher has discovered is that librarians who offer e-mail reference would like it to work well. There are frustrations inherent in all services, and these must be worked through. The rapid pace of technology may require more libraries to consider e-mail reference as an option as more patrons begin to access goods and services through the World Wide Web and expect the same from libraries.

Recommendations for Further Study

Considering the nature of the World Wide Web, researchers could do a longitudinal study over the next ten years, addressing the use of e-mail reference in Ohio public libraries. Another option for study is surveying the Ohio public libraries that have elected not to have an e-mail address on the Web page or that have specifically stated no e-mail reference is accepted. Along the same lines, a study could be done to discover how e-mail reference is used in public libraries across the United States or even in other countries. A case study of a few individual libraries would be helpful to learn of more detailed issues involving e-mail reference. Finally, this researcher recommends a study of patrons and e-mail reference, a user study.

APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER

Re: E-mail Reference in Ohio Public Libraries

January 7, 1999

Dear Librarian:

I am a graduate student in the School of Library and Information Science at Kent State University. As part of my master's degree requirements, I am conducting a study about the use of e-mail reference in Ohio's public libraries. The enclosed questionnaire is designed to determine current use and policy regarding e-mail reference in Ohio public libraries that maintain a web site in which a n e-mail address is posted as a mode of contact. Much of the research in this area has concentrated on academic libraries, so this information will be useful to both theorists and practitioners in the field of library and information science, particularly those involved in public libraries.

Confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed. You are not required to sign your name. Also, only the investigator has access to the survey data. If you choose not to participate or, at any time, you decide to withdraw from participating, there is no penalty. Your cooperation in this study is strictly voluntary. A copy of the results of the study will be available upon request.

If you have any further questions, please contact me at (330) 672-6334 or my research advisor, Dr. Greg Byerly, at (330) 672-2782. I may also be reached at my e-mail address: tess_true@hotmail.com If you have any further questions regarding research at Kent State University, you may contact Dr. M. Thomas Jones at (330) 672-2851.

Thanks for your cooperation; it is very much appreciated. If you are not responsible for your library's e-mail, please forward this to the appropriate librarian with my sincere thanks. Please return the questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope to me at the following address:

Teresa Lay
511 Korb Hall
16 Petrarca Dr., Kent State University
Kent, Ohio 44243

Respectfully,

Teresa M. Lay
Graduate Student

APPENDIX B

E-MAIL REFERENCE IN OHIO PUBLIC LIBRARIES QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How large is your library's collection?
__ <100,000 volumes __ 100,000 - 549,999 volumes
__ 550,000 - 1,000,000 volumes __ >1,000,000 volumes

2. Which word best describes your library's location?
__ rural __ suburban __ urban

3. How long has your library's Webpage been operational?
__ <1 year __ 1 - 3 years __ 4 - 6 years __ 7 - 9 years __ ≥10 years

4. Do you have a written library policy regarding the library's response to e-mail received from patrons? Yes No
If yes, please include a copy of the policy with the questionnaire.

5. How often is the library e-mail checked?
__ once a day __ once a week __ once a month other: _____

6. Who is responsible for checking the library's e-mail?
__ a paraprofessional __ the library director __ a volunteer
__ a reference librarian __ other: _____

7. How are the library's e-mails referred or distributed to others?
_____
_____
_____

8. Has the Webpage increased the influx of the library's e-mail? Yes No
Comments: _____
_____
_____

9. How many e-mails from patrons does the library receive in an average week?
__ 1 - 10 __ 11 - 20 __ 21 - 30 __ 31 - 40 __ 41 - 50 __ >50

10. Please list the three most predominant reasons for e-mail received from library patrons (e.g. reference, general questions about the library, renewal of materials, program registrations).

a. _____ b. _____ c. _____

11. Regarding your answer to #10 (**a**), approximately how many of those e-mails does your library receive in a week?
__ 1 - 5 __ 6 - 10 __ 11 - 15 __ 16 - 20 __ 21 - 25 __ >25

12. Regarding your answer to #10 (**b**), approximately how many of those e-mails does your library receive in a week?
__ 1 - 5 __ 6 - 10 __ 11 - 15 __ 16 - 20 __ 21 - 25 __ >25

13. Regarding your answer to #10 (**c**), approximately how many of those e-mails does your library receive in a week?
__ 1 - 5 __ 6 - 10 __ 11 - 15 __ 16 - 20 __ 21 - 25 __ >25

14. What percentage of the monthly e-mail consists of reference questions?
__ 0 - 25% __ 25 - 50% __ 50 - 75% __ 75 - 100%

15. Does your library accept e-mail reference questions? Yes No
If no, please skip questions 17 - 26.

16. Is answering e-mail reference an assigned task? (If no, skip #17.) Yes No

17. Does a reference librarian answer e-mail reference questions? Yes No
If yes, please skip #18.

18. Who is responsible for answering e-mail reference? _____

19. What is the response time for answering an e-mail reference question?
__ a day __ two days __ a week __ other: _____
Comments: _____
_____
_____

20. Does your library save records of e-mail reference correspondence? Yes No

21. A reference interview can be negotiated successfully via e-mail.
__ strongly disagree __ disagree __ agree __ strongly agree

22. On a scale from 1 to 5 (one being the lowest), how successful is e-mail reference? 1 2 3 4 5
Comments _____
_____
_____

23. E-mail reference service is similar to (check all that apply):
__ reference via telephone __ reference in person
__ reference via postal service __ reference via fax

24. Does your library have a fill-in form for e-mail reference? Yes No

25. Has your library publicized e-mail reference? Yes No
If yes, please describe the methods used. _____
_____
_____
_____

26. Please explain your library's procedure for responding to e-mail reference.

Please use the bottom of this page to write any additional comments you have about e-mail reference.

Your position (**optional**): _____

Your e-mail address (**optional**): _____

May I contact you via e-mail for further comments? Yes No

Thanks for completing and returning the survey!

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